DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 223 933 CG 016 342

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TITLE Frankl's Theory and Therapy.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Western Gerontological Society (27th, Seattle, WA, April 11-15, 1981).
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; Autobiographies; Counseling Theories; Group Therapy; *Personality Theories; *Psychotherapy; *Quality of Life; Self Actualization; Suicide; *Therapeutic Environment; *Values Clarification
IDENTIFIERS *Logotherapy

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the life, theories, and therapeutic techniques of psychotherapist, Viktor E. Frankl. A brief biography of Frankl is included discussing the relationship of his early experiences as a physician to his theory of personality. Frankl's theory focusing on man's need for meaning and emphasizing the spiritual dimension in each human being is further explained. Logotherapy, Frankl's term for his form of psychotherapy, including recognition of the importance of the need for meaning and values, (creative, experiential, and attitudinal values) is discussed in detail. The practice of Logotherapy including the two approaches for its application with individuals, i.e., paradoxical intention (based on self transcendence) and dereflection (based on self detachment) are described. The use of Logotherapy in small groups, a method to help a person with frustrated or blocked conscience find the way back to a sound conscience is also described. Each person in the group is encouraged to find his or her own meaning to life. (PAS)

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A. Biography

It would be impossible to fully understand the theory and therapy of Viktor E. Frankl without knowing something about his life. Theories are often better explained by the life experiences of the author than by scientific analysis.

Frankl was born in Vienna (Austria) on the 26th of March in 1905. He was of Jewish origin. When only 3 years old, he told his mother of his ambition to become a physician. His interest in that profession stemmed from his curiosity as to why anyone would want to commit suicide. As a child, Frankl was frightened by the thought of his eventual death and was especially worried that he might die in his sleep.

Frankl's strong desire to read as much as possible began in early childhood. Freud's work, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, made a deep impression on him. During his adolescent years, Frankl became interested in experimental psychology. In 1922, he wrote a letter to Sigmund Freud, which Freud personally answered. This was the beginning of a long correspondence. Unfortunately, the letters were lost during the Second World War. Frankl was only 19 years old when his first scientific article, Zur Enstehung Des Mimischen Bejahung und Verneinung (1924), was published in Freud's International Journal of Psychoanalysis. Frankl became increasingly interested in psychiatry and philosophical theories, and was attracted to socialism as a means of helping people. In 1924, he was elected president of the Socialist Youth in Austria.

Around 1925, he began to take interest in Alfred Adler's theory but could not totally accept Adler's approach. Nevertheless, he decided to join Adler's school. Differences between Adler and Frankl became increasingly apparent. Some of Adler's disciples pressured Frankl to leave Adler's group, but he refused.

Only 25 years old when he graduated from medical school, Frankl began his career as a physician, specializing in neurology and psychiatry. He worked in a psychiatric unit that specialized in treating young people who were planning to commit suicide. More than 3,000 patients were admitted into that unit annually. Every day Frankl encountered people who felt that their lives were meaningless. On the basis of his experience with suicidal patients, Frankl concluded that the will to give meaning to life is a fundamental need in human existence. In 1936 he became a licensed psychiatrist and began his own private practice. Two years later, Nazi Germany invaded and annexed Austria. Frankl knew that as a Jew he would have problems, but refused to leave the country and his people.

During the beginning of the war, Frankl was director of the Rothschildhospital in Vienna. The systematic persecution of Jews became rampant around 1942. Frankl and all the members of his family were arrested and sent to concentration camps. There he encountered human suffering of an unimaginable extent. Frankl's father died of hunger at concentration camp Theresienstadt. When Frankl saw him for the last time, his father was trying to eat some dry potato skins but could not swallow them. His mother died in the gas chamber at Auschwitz. His wife died in the concentration

camp of Bergen-Belsen, and his brother at Auschwitz. The only survivor of his family is his sister, who is now living in Australia. His experiences in different concentration camps with prisoners who were able to find meaning in their own sufferings, have given Frankl a strong belief in the value of his own theory.

When the war ended in 1945, Frankl returned to Vienna. He published his first book, Ärztliche Seelsorge, in 1946, and the next year, Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager was released. On the 18th of July in 1947, Frankl married Eleanor Schwudt. One daughter, Gabriele, was born to them. That same year, he was promoted to professor of psychiatry and neurology at the University of Vienna and, in 1948 received his Ph.D. Frankl published a new book each year from 1949 til 1952: Der Unbedingte Mensch, Homo Patiens, Logos und Existenz, and Psychotherapie im Alltag. Through the support of Gordon Allport in the United States, Frankl became a well-known lecturer. He traveled to various countries, giving lectures at many universities, including Harvard University, University of California at Berkeley, Southern Methodist University, Stanford University and Duquesne University.

At the U.S. International University of San Diego he holds the chair of logotherapy, and has taught there several times. His books have been translated into 15 different languages, including Chinese and Japanese. Still very active, Frankl continues to publish today.

B. Theory of the Meaning of Life

To explain human behavior Freud speaks of the pleasure principle, individual psychology emphasizes the will to power, but Frankl is convinced that what inspires a person most deeply is the will to meaning (Frankl, 1963, p. 154), the innate desire to give as much meaning as possible to one's life.

Many patients come to a therapist with questions such as "What is the meaning of my life?", "Tell me why I have to live," and "Why was I brought into this world?"

Frankl contends that there are three basic dimensions in each human being: the somatic or physiological; the mental, which includes feelings and intellect; and the spiritual (Frankl, 1967, pp. 133-142). The spiritual dimension should not be ignored since it is what sets humans apart from other species (Frankl, 1967, p. 74). This dimension is a uniquely human privilege. A person can question the meaning of his life and will base his behavior upon the answer to that question. An animal certainly never thinks about the meaning of its existence.

Frankl tells us that the will to continue living even under the most unpleasant conditions can exist only when such survival appears to have meaning for a particular individual (Frankl, 1965, p. X). Since each person is unique, that meaning varies from one individual to another and may change from one part of a person's life to another (Frankl, 1963, pp. 171-172).

According to Frankl, psychology should not only be a theoretical science, but should also be able to apply its principles for the benefit of human beings. "Logotherapy" is Frankl's term for his form of psychotherapy,

an approach that recognizes the importance of the spiritual dimension or the need for meaning and values (Frankl, 1967, p. 74). "Logos" is a Greek word for "meaning" or "value."

Just as sexual frustration may lead to sexual neurosis, it is conceivable that frustration of the will to meaning may lead to existential or noogenic neurosis (Frankl, 1965, p. XII). Such neuroses are caused by spiritial problems or by moral or value conflicts. Psychogenic and somatogenic neuroses, in contrast, are caused by instinctual and environmental conflicts.

As human beings, we are confronted with the challenge of creating meaningful lives for ourselves. A person can find meaning in life by believing in values (Frankl, 1965, p. XII). There are three possibilities:

- Creative Values

  One can give meaning to life by realizing creative values, that is, by achieving tasks, (Frankl, 1963, pp. 175-176; Frankl, 1978, p. 39); for example, by writing a book, by building a house, or by devoting oneself to a career.

- Experiential Values

  Another way to discover meaning in life is by realizing experiential values, by experiencing the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, or by knowing one single human being in all his or her uniqueness. And to experience one human being as unique means to love that person (Frankl, 1965, p. 132). Love, beauty, and truth may keep a person alive by providing a reason for continuing to live. The love of their husband or wife gives many people the

most profound meaning of their life.

- Attitudinal Values

A person may, however, be in such great distress that neither creative values nor experiential values can give meaning to life (Frankl, 1963, p. 181). Such a person can still find meaning through the way in which he or she faces their affliction (Frankl, 1963, p. 178). By taking one's sufferings upon oneself a person may realize attitudinal values. The possibility of realizing values by the very attitude with which we face unavoidable suffering exists to the very last moment of our lives. An honorable kind of suffering is perhaps the highest achievement possible to a human being. No one can better exemplify what life is all about than a person who is sick or dying. Attitudinal values may be illustrated by the following story.

> A colleague doctor turned to me because he could not come to terms with the loss of his wife, who had died two years before. His marriage had been very happy and he was now extremely depressed. I asked him quite simply: "Tell me what would have happened if you had died first and your wife had survived you?" "That would have been terrible," he said, "How my wife would have suffered!" "Well, you see," I answered, "your wife has been spared that, and it was you who spared her, though of course you must now pay by surviving and mourning her." In that very moment, his mourning had been given a meaning--the meaning of a sacrifice (Frankl, 1964, p. XIV).

Perhaps the vital point is that persons should not ask what they should expect from life, but rather should understand that life expects something from them (Frankl, 1963, p. 133). In the last analysis, people should not ask "What is the meaning of my life?" but must realize that they themselves are being questioned (Frankl, 1963, p. 172). Frankl states that the

"answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual" (Frankl, 1963, p. 122).

Life is a task. An important part of that task is the responsibility of each person to actualize values. Therefore, our educational system should focus more upon educating a person toward responsibility. In Western Society, however, education does not adequately prepare people to actualize values and to take responsibility for it. Education, rather than being concerned solely with the transmission of knowledge and tradition, should have as its main goal training people to find meaning in their lives and to be responsible (Frankl, 1969, p. 64). The role education must play is more important now than ever before, as traditional values are being questioned, and people are looking for new values.

Frankl regards freedom as a fundamental human right. A critical danger, however, lies in the tendency of people to forget that freedom must be tempered with responsibility to prevent it from degenerating into mere licentiousness. "That is why I would like to recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast" (Frankl, 1978, p. 49).

Seeking a meaning to one's life, and even questioning that such a meaning is available, is not a sign of disease, as some psychologists could think, but rather is a human privilege and achievement.

It is a human prerogative to question whether life has meaning. However, a person who has the courage to question life's meaning should

learn to be patient. Patience is necessary if one is to find real values, or real meaning to life. Some day that person will find out that life and every circumstance in life holds, and never ceases to have meaning.

In the rushing that is so characteristic of American society, people's activities tend to divert their attention from the need for meaning in their lives. People not only need leisure time but also more time for contemplation and meditation in a quiet place. Each person should have a "desert" where he or she can be completely alone and can take refuge from overwork and from noise. It takes a lot of courage to be alone with one's thoughts. For those who cannot find solitude somewhere in the countryside or on the beach, it would be good if they could each have their own "portable desert," where they can find solitude amid noisy surroundings.

C. The Practice of Logotherapy

Logotherapy is Frankl's method to help people find meaning in their lives. It is similar in some aspects to analytically-oriented therapies, in the sense that the therapist is trying to help the client detect unconscious values that could give meaning to life.

The logotherapist will try to make the client conscious of his or her responsibilities but will not push him to accept the therapist's own values. The therapist tries to make the patient aware of new alternatives. Logotherapy is future-oriented. Throughout the therapy the person will be oriented to some task as a goal to fulfill the future.

Logotherapy can be used on an individual or a group basis. In applying his therapy on an individual basis, Frankl relies on two approaches: paradoxical intention, based on self-transcendence, and dereflection, based on self-detachment.

Paradoxical intention has been used by Frankl since the beginning of his career as a therapist in 1929 in Vienna, but it was not until ten years later that he explained it in an article (Frankl, 1939). After the Second World War, he developed his technique further.

Paradoxical intention is mainly used as a treatment for two forms of neuroses, namely, phobias and obsessive-compulsive neuroses. Both forms of neuroses are reactions to anticipatory anxiety--anxiety which often produces precisely that situation of which the patient is afraid (Frankl, 1967, p. 200). In paradoxical intention, the neurotic person is invited to do, or to wish to happen, the things that cause fear and anxiety in that person (Frankl, 1969, p. 102). A person who suffers from a phobia and is afraid of particular things must be invited to do or to wish for the thing that he or she fears. Because a chemical imbalance is sometimes part of the cause of abnormal behavior, Frankl contends that it is often beneficial to combine psychotherapy with pharmacological therapy. The therapist exposes the client to situations that are increasingly threatening and helps the client to deal with them. To treat a case of claustrophobia, Frankl's approach would involve asking the person to relax, to take deep breaths, and to face the threatening situation as if it didn't matter.

To a person with an obsessive neurosis Frankl would suggest performing the obsessive behavior more often than usual so that the ridiculousness of the behavior becomes obvious to the client. For example, a person who has an obsession to wash his hands ten times a day will be invited to do so 30 times a day. Humor, which allows a person to make use of the human capacity for self-detachment, plays a very important role in the practice of

paradoxical intention (Frankl, 1969, pp. 108-109; Frankl, 1965, pp. 224-225).

Paradoxical intention is a short-term process in many cases because results are often achieved quickly. Following is an example cited by Frankl (1978):

> Mrs. N, a 48-year-old lady diagnosed as hysteric, had body shaking and trembling. She would have trembling fits to the extent that she was not able to hold a cup of coffee without spilling it over and over. She could not write or hold a book firmly enough to read. One morning she came out of her room and was sitting in front of me on the other side of the table when she started trembling and shaking. There were no other patients around, so I decided to use paradoxical intention in a really humorous way.
>
> Therapist: How would you like to compete with me in shaking, Mrs. N?
>
> Patient: (shocked) What?
>
> Therapist: Let us see who can shake and tremble faster and for how long.
>
> Patient: Are you suffering from these shakes, too?
>
> Therapist: No, I am not suffering from them, but I can tremble if I want to (I began to shake).
>
> Patient: Gee. You are doing it faster (trying to speed up and smiling).

Therapist: Faster. Come on, Mrs. N, faster.

Patient: I can't (she was becoming tired). Quit it. I can't do it anymore. (She got up, went in the day room, and brought herself a cup of coffee. She drank the whole cup without spilling it once.)

Therapist: That was fun, wasn't it?

Afterward, whenever I would see her shaking, I would say, "Come on, Mrs. N, let's have a race" and she would say, "O.K. it sure works." (pp. 120-121)

The second logotherapeutic approach is called dereflection and is used mainly to treat people suffering from sexual neuroses. Generally, people with sexual neurosis suffer from hyperintention and hyperreflection. Hyperintention refers to trying to feel good but, as Frankl points out, "The direct intention of pleasure defeats itself" (Frankl, 1969, pp. 99-100). Excessive attention is what is meant by the term hyperreflection (Frankl, 1969, p. 100). Hyperintentions and hyperreflections serve to make the situation worse because they centralize more and more on the negative aspects of oneself. When a person is overly concerned with his or her own sexuality, the result is diminished awareness of the sexuality of his or her partner. The therapist trained in logotherapy will challenge the client to become more aware of the other person rather than focusing upon himself or herself. Dereflection involves diverting the attention away from oneself.

Logotherapy in small groups started in the United States under the impetus of J. Fabry (1974). The purpose is to cure people through a group setting. The word "cure" is used loosely here because the participants are not sick but frustrated. They are not satisfied with themselves, feel imprisoned in unhappy situations, and are suffering from an inner vacuum. That vacuum must be filled with things which are meaningful for them.

The logotherapist will first of all try to make persons conscious of belonging to a universal order; whether that universal order is called God, nature, or vital force is not a concern. The existence of such a consciousness can only be verified by experiencing life.

Every person is unique and goes through different situations that have a special significance for that individual. The task confronting each person is to answer the significance of a situation for himself or herself. People are free to answer to the problems in the way they prefer but must also accept responsibility for their answers.

Sometimes people do not know what to do or what is best for themselves. The best way to resolve such a dilemma is to follow the conscience. The conscience can never be wrong, only blocked or frustrated, because consciousness is a specific aspect of a human dimension, says Frankl (1967, p. 3). A logotherapeutic group can help a person with a frustrated or blocked conscience to find the way back to a sound conscience.

In these groups, people just talk; nothing is planned. A very quiet atmosphere will facilitate communication. A person who does not wish to talk is not forced to do so. However, anyone who chooses to talk must be honest. At the beginning of a session, it is common to ask the participants to write down topics that they would like to talk about as well

as issues that they would prefer not to discuss. The role of the group's director is not to resolve the problems of the participants but to clarify them. The director encourages people to express themselves as much as possible.

The leader must not discuss the words or ideas of other persons. The emphasis is on trying to understand oneself and the others. Understanding oneself is a prerequisite to being able to understand others. No one has to accept the meaning of life of another participant. Each person must try to find his or her own meaning. There are various ways in which one can find meaning in life, but the best way is certainly through human communication, by talking and by listening, to oneself as well as to others. A person who has suffered a great deal will be able to understand the suffering of another person. A former alcoholic will be able to understand a person who is currently suffering from alcoholism. The basis of this approach is that you can best be helped by a person who has faced the same problems. An older person will be better able to understand the aging process of other people if he or she has fully and consciously experienced his or her own aging process and found meaning in it.

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